THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan

1242. SHRI K. M. SAIFULLAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the population of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan before the Taliban regime came to power there along with population at present;

(b) the number of Hindus and Sikhs who have come to India during the Taliban regime there; and

(c) whether Government have taken any steps to send them back to Afghanistan and provide help to them?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) to (c) In absence of any official census in Afghanistan, precise figures of population in Afghanistan, including Afghans of Indian origin, are not available. There have been varying estimates regarding the population of Afghan citizens of Indian origin in Afghanistan.

On account of civil conflict of past several years in Afghanistan, and repressive regime of the Taliban, a large number of Afghan nationals, including those of Indian origin have been living in India. According to the figures available with the Ministry of Home Affairs, there are about 18,500 registered Afghans in India. Another few thousands are Maying on UNHCR certificates, it is estimated that about 60% of the Afghan nationals staying in India are of Indian origin.

With the eslabhshment of the Afghan Interim Administration government would encourage Afghan citizens, including those of Indian origin, to return to their country.